

Area Woman Served as Soldier in Civil War

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In the Civil War, the Illinois 3rd Cavalry Company K was made up of almost all Fairbury area men. One of this unit's significant battles occurred at Guntown, Mississippi. Another Illinois military unit, the 95th Illinois Infantry Company G, also fought with Fairbury's Company K in the Guntown battle.

In the 95th Infantry Company G was a soldier named Albert Cashier. In the State of Illinois Civil War database, the soldier's name is misspelled as Albert D.J. Cashire. At the time of his enlistment, Albert was 19 years old, was five foot three inches in height, with auburn hair and blue eyes, with a light complexion. Albert said he was single and was a farmer from New York City, New York. Albert enlisted in Company G on August 6, 1862. Albert enlisted in Belvedere, Illinois, and Elliott N. Bush joined him to the military.

Albert Cashier fought for the Union Army for just over three years. He was mustered out in August of 1865 at Camp Butler, Illinois, by Captain Hall. Albert's 95th Infantry fought at the battles of Raymond, Jackson, Champion's Hill, Big Black River, Vicksburg, Pleasant Hill, Kennesaw Mountain, Atlanta, and Jonesboro.

At the Siege of Vicksburg, Cashier was captured while performing reconnaissance. Cashier managed to escape, however, and make his way back to the regiment. After the Battle of Vicksburg, in June 1863, Cashier contracted chronic diarrhea and entered a military hospital. After recovering in the hospital, Cashier returned to active duty.

Throughout the war, Cashier's unit traveled a total of about 9,000 miles during its term. Other soldiers thought that Cashier was small and preferred to be alone, which were not uncommon characteristics for soldiers.

After the war, Cashier returned to Belvedere, Illinois, where he worked for Samuel Pepper. He then settled in Saunemin, Illinois, in 1869. In Saunemin, he worked as a farmhand as well as performing odd jobs around the town. Albert Cashier can be found on records of the town payroll.

His employer there, Joshua Chesebro, built a one-room house for him. For over forty years, he lived in Saunemin and was a church janitor, cemetery worker, and street lamplighter. Albert voted in elections and later claimed a veteran's pension under the name Albert Cashier.

In later years, he ate with the neighboring Lannon family. Later on, when Albert fell ill, the Lannon family discovered that he was female when they asked a nurse to examine her. The family did not make their discovery public that Albert was really a female.

In 1911, Cashier was hit by a car that broke her leg. A physician discovered her secret in the hospital but did not disclose the information. On May 5, 1911, because she was no longer able to work, Cashier was moved to the Soldiers and Sailors home in Quincy, Illinois. During this stay, Hodggers was visited by many of her fellow soldiers from the Ninety-fifth Regiment. She lived there until her mental state deteriorated, and she was moved to the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane in March 1914.

Attendants at the Watertown State Hospital discovered that she was female when giving her a bath, at which point she was made to wear women's clothes again after fifty years. Albert Cashier died on October 10, 1915. She was buried in the Civil War uniform she had kept intact all those years, and her tombstone was inscribed "Albert D. J. Cashier, Co. G, 95 Ill. Inf." Albert Cashier was given an official Grand Army of the Republic funerary service and was buried with full military honors.

It took W.J. Singleton (executor of Cashier's estate) nine years to track Cashier's identity back to her birth name of Jennie Hodggers. None of the heirs proved convincing, and the estate of \$418.46 was deposited in the Adams County, Illinois, treasury. In the 1970s, a second tombstone, inscribed with both of her names, was placed beside the first.

After she died in 1915, further research found that her real name was Jennie Irene Hodggers. Hodggers was born in Clogherhead, County Louth, Ireland, on December 25, around the year 1843. According to a later investigation by the administrator of her estate, she was the child of Sallie and Patrick Hodggers.

Hodggers's later accounts of how she moved to the United States and why she enlisted were taken when she was elderly and disoriented. She was also typically evasive about her earlier life; therefore, those narratives were contradictory. Usually, she was said to have been dressed in boy's clothing by her stepfather to find work. Even before the advent of the war, Hodggers adopted the identity of Albert Cashier to work. Her mother died sometime in her youth. By 1862, Hodggers had traveled as a stowaway to Illinois and was living in Belvedere.

It turns out that over 400 women served as men during the Civil War. Albert's case is unique because she continued to act like a man after the war was over. Lon P. Dawson, a veteran who lived at the Illinois Veterans Home where Cashier once lived, wrote a biography about her titled "Also Known As Albert D. J. Cashier: The Jennie Hodggers Story." The novel "My Last Skirt" by Lynda Durrant is based on her life.

Cashier's grave can be seen at the Sunny Slope Cemetery in Saunemin. A video about the life of Jennie Hodggers/Albert Cashier can be viewed on YouTube. Cashier's little house has been restored in Saunemin. A graduate student at Loyola University is working on a project to add the small house to the National Register of Historic Places.



Civil War Private Albert D.J. Cashier
photographed in uniform in November
of 1864.